



INVESTOR IN PEOPLE

Application No: GB 0222697.5
Claims searched: 1-10

Examiner: Ben James
Date of search: 27 March 2003

Patents Act 1977 : Search Report under Section 17

Documents considered to be relevant:

Category	Relevant to claims	Identity of document and passage or figure of particular relevance
A	-	http://www.gamespot.com/pc/strategy/sims/review.html (dated review of "The Sims"). The release date of "The Sims" is 02/01/2000 can be found at http://www.gamerankings.com/htmlpages2/3075.asp
A	-	http://www.fi.edu/fellows/fellow3/apr99/simcity2000/why.htm (review of "Sim city 2000"). The release date of "Sim City 2000" is 03/01/1995 and can be found at http://www.gamerankings.com/htmlpages2/24363.asp

Categories:

X	Document indicating lack of novelty or inventive step	A	Document indicating technological background and/or state of the art.
Y	Document indicating lack of inventive step if combined with one or more other documents of same category.	P	Document published on or after the declared priority date but before the filing date of this invention.
&	Member of the same patent family	E	Patent document published on or after, but with priority date earlier than, the filing date of this application.

Field of Search:

Search of GB, EP, WO & US patent documents classified in the following areas of the UKC^V:

G4A, A6H

Worldwide search of patent documents classified in the following areas of the IPC⁷:

G06F, A63F

The following online and other databases have been used in the preparation of this search report:

ON-LINE: EPODOC, WPI, JAPIO and WWW

Maxis' The Sims is about creating, managing, and controlling the lives of tiny computerized people who dwell in miniature homes. The game's excellent music and sound effects, detailed scenery, cleverly animated characters, and equally clever writing go a long way toward fulfilling this intriguing premise. Yet though you can exercise a considerable amount of control over your sims' behavior and lifestyles, The Sims' actual gameplay is rather limited in some respects - either by odd inconsistencies or by actual restrictions placed on your actions. But to the game's credit, the most objectionable thing about these occasional limits is how starkly they contrast with the otherwise tremendous freedom you have to lead your sims' lives.

At a glance, The Sims looks fairly good, if plain. The game itself takes place entirely within a small suburb just outside SimCity, and the streets, houses, and fixtures are all colorful and detailed - and all in a style consistent with the SimCity games. At first, the fully polygonal characters might look no better than the scenery. But if you leave them alone for even a few minutes, your sims will do all sorts of things; they'll dance to the radio's music, hunker down in front of the TV, or strike up a conversation. And when your sims start doing anything, they'll do so with expressive animation that lends them a great deal of personality. When the music is playing, sims dance the Charleston together; TV-watching sims will lean forward and gaze intently at the screen or laugh out loud; and conversing sims will gesticulate appropriately as they chat, dish out insults, tell jokes, and more.

Despite the fact that the actual dialogue among the game's inhabitants is made to sound like complete gibberish, The Sims sounds superb overall. You can't make out exactly what they're saying, but you can easily infer their intentions from the tone of their voices. Sims will speak, then pause and clear their throats while they're thinking of what to say next, yelp in pain when they cut themselves preparing a meal, or tell naughty limericks as jokes. Sims also interact with their surroundings, and everything from coffee makers to toilets sounds realistic, clear, and in some cases downright hilarious, like the slapstick noises of the TV cartoons. The Sims' music is also excellent; even though much of it consists of vapid easy-listening, those unassuming tunes provide a perfect ironic contrast in the background against whatever havoc your sims are wreaking on center stage.

Your sims can get into all sorts of trouble depending on what choices you make in their design and actions. You can begin the game with a pre-generated family of sims or create your own using a number of different 3D models, more of which are constantly being made available on Maxis' web site. Each sim has five personality attributes (neat, outgoing, active, playful, and nice) which help determine the sim's personality and how compatible he'll be with other sims. Each sim also has six learnable skills (cooking, mechanical, charisma, body, logic, and creativity), which not only affect the way a sim interacts with his fellow sims but also how well he can make use of the objects in his house and how well he can perform his job. There are ten career paths available in The Sims; each is best served with a sim trained in a particular combination of the six skills. Once you find a job in the daily paper or online via a computer, your sim will be picked up by a carpool at a certain time each day. Getting a job is advisable, since it's really the only way for your sims to bring in a steady income to buy more stuff.

One of the most important things to do in The Sims is to buy things, whether appliances or furniture for the inside of your house, or walls, windows, or even a second story for the outside. For instance, a new mirror will let your sims increase their charisma, and a new stove will help them cook more satisfying meals. Each product you buy for your sims' home has its

own description; many of these are extremely funny, and it's worth the effort to simply browse through them just to read some of the better gags. There's a fair variety of products to choose from, and Maxis intends to continually provide new household goods for download. In addition, you'll eventually want to expand the size of your house's exterior, since a bigger house means more room for more sims and more stuff. You can do so quickly and easily with one of The Sims' many user-friendly interfaces, the build mode, which lets you customize, add, or remove all sorts of new walls, floors, windows, doors and more with some clicks and drags. Building up a good house is important because you'll need it to fulfill your sims' needs. Every sim has eight needs: hunger, comfort, hygiene, bladder, energy, fun, social, and room, and each need is indicated by a status bar that fills up when needs are met, but are constantly being drained otherwise. If any of these status bars drops down significantly, your sims will become agitated and unhappy. And if any becomes completely empty, your sims may suffer anything from a small mess (if your sim doesn't make it to the restroom) to a complete disaster, as a sim who gets nothing to eat will eventually die of starvation. In most cases, a sim who's suffering from neglect of one or more of his needs will usually become morose and depressed: He won't go to work, will often ignore instructions, and won't interact with other sims.

As a result, it's important to keep your sims happy, or they'll miss out on the most intriguing part of the game - interaction with other sims. Though the sims you start the game with will tend to be familiar with each other, they won't know the other sims in the neighborhood. It's usually a good idea for your sims to get acquainted with others, as social interaction is not only required to fulfill your sims' social need bar, but it's also the key to advancing in the ranks of certain professions. When your sims do meet other sims, you'll first be given the option of greeting them, though as you associate with them more often, you'll find more dialogue options available depending on moods, personalities, and your relationships. For example, you might try and hit it off with your neighbor's wife, but if her husband sees you, you might be in for trouble. Sims will interact with each other in entirely different ways depending on the situation, and given the many different factors that can affect a situation, your sims can and will do something to, for, or with others that you may or may not have expected. Though sometimes these situations may end in insubordination or hostility, it's these exchanges and their results that truly make The Sims an interesting game to play. And they'll provide you with enough motivation to continue playing, whether you're trying to focus a particular sim on a specific character strength or weakness, or just trying to re-create a scene from your favorite book, play, or movie.

Yet it's these considerable strengths that also reveal what seem to be The Sims' comparable weaknesses. For starters, the flow of time in the game is strange, to say the least; even though The Sims' general play interface supports camera zooming and scrolling, the camera itself handles sluggishly. Likewise, many of the sims' activities - such as preparing and eating meals or using the bathroom - are also unduly time-consuming. However, time itself passes quickly in The Sims, even on the slowest setting. As such, to make the most efficient use of your time, you may find yourself awkwardly alternating between pausing the game to catch up the camera to your sims, then speeding the game up to skip through a time-consuming task like eating or bathing, then pausing again to queue up your sims' next set of actions. Also, though sims have several sophisticated routines governed by their personalities and moods, they also occasionally display poor pathfinding and general artificial-intelligence problems - such as being unable to move, or move around, small obstacles.

In addition, there are instances in The Sims in which the game seems limited by its own scope

of chronicling only the happy home lives of its inhabitants. For instance, going to work is completely bereft of player interaction - your sim jumps in the carpool, disappears for several hours, and barring any random occurrences, reappears with a paycheck, and that's more or less it. You can't control your sim at work or access him while he's away, nor does your sim's actual choice of career path really affect his social life in any way. In addition, it really is best to keep your sims' needs met at least some of the time, since purposely neglecting a sim makes him depressed and often insubordinate. You can keep a sim productive and responsive to instructions by keeping him happy, but you can't do nearly as much with a neglected sim; he can't become a resentful outcast shaped into a vengeful drifter by adverse situations - he'll just turn into a self-pitying couch potato who'll often ignore you.

This isn't to say that The Sims isn't an enjoyable and intriguing game, because it is. If you relished the feeling of complete control of building a city in SimCity, then you will doubtless enjoy the experience of building a domestic life in The Sims. And even those who didn't will still likely find themselves engrossed in The Sims' bright-looking, real-sounding, and highly detailed world of miniature people.

By Andrew Seyoon Park, *GameSpot* [POSTED: 02/11/00 12:02 AM]